

Vet Gazette

July 2008

A quarterly publication of
VA Western NY
Healthcare System

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Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom Care Management Team

Honoring the opportunity to provide benefits
information and assistance to those
who honorably fought and served in our
nation's armed forces.

VA Western New York Healthcare System

Buffalo - Batavia - Dunkirk - Jamestown - Niagara Falls
Lackawanna - Lockport - Niagara Falls - Olean - Warsaw



The Finegan Focus



Mr. Feeley, VA Central Office Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management announced that the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs has approved my appointment as VISN Director, VISN 11, effective in the late summer. VISN 11 is based in Ann Arbor, Michigan and serves veterans of Michigan, Indiana, and parts of Illinois.

I face this challenge with mixed emotions. I am excited about the opportunity to meet and work with other VA colleagues who are privileged to serve our nation's veterans and to try to have an impact at a VISN level. But my family and I have made Western New York our home for 5 years and we will truly miss all the people we've met whom we have come to call friends.

It's been my privilege to serve you, our veterans, veterans' stakeholders, and government representatives in Western New York over the last five years; all I can say is thank you. Thank you

for the inspiration to be excited to come to work every day and for the freedom my family and I are fortunate to enjoy.

Thank you for the selfless service to your country that extends long after you've worn the uniform. Caring for veterans is not solely the job of the VA but the entire nation. Individuals like you who do it for love and not for personal glory humble me and really put things in perspective. Thank you for that!!

VA Central Office will begin a search for a new director shortly. Dr. Lemons, VISN 2 Director will name an acting director to cover the period during the transition and that should be announced shortly. Please give that person your full support.

As I move to the next phase of my career, I will always look back and see how Western New York is doing. I'll be watching to see that the community will rally around its resilient citizens and that the VA staff and supporters will honor the important work it has in serving those who have served us. Good luck and Godspeed to you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Finegan".

Michael S. Finegan, Director
VA Western New York Healthcare System



*On June 30, 2008, the Lockport VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic
relocated to 5883 Snyder Drive, Lockport, New York 14094
phone: 716-438-3890*

Getting to Know the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Care Management Team

By Jennifer Putnam

"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." That is the quotation that is featured in the pamphlet for the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Care Management Team at VA Western New York Healthcare System and it is a quotation that the team members take to heart.

As the number of troops in need of support returning from the current war grew, Katherine Smythe, LCSW and other staff members at VA recognized the need for a care management team for these service members and veterans. Plans for a care management team began as early as March 2003 with the inception of the REST Team (Re-Entry Support Team). In October 2007, the care management team officially became reality. Recently, the team relocated to the first floor of the hospital in a suite that was designed to be a welcoming and peaceful environment for the service members, veterans and families.

The OEF/OIF Care Management Team consists of 10 staff, and each team member brings a vital aspect to the group. Katherine Smythe, program manager, has worked to bring the OEF/OIF program to where it is at today, calling it her "dream." Sharon Panasiewicz, program assistant, is there to welcome visitors to the new program and coordinates appointments throughout the facility. Jeanne Heintz, Ed. M, readjustment counselor, is also 1st Sgt. in the Air Force Reserves, focuses on outreach events and educational components of the program. Mary Williams, Ph.D, RN, serves as the medical liaison to providers regarding polytrauma, seriously ill issues and in general health care needs. The social work care managers are Rose Attardo, LMSW and Terry McMahan, LCSW who focus on the overall evaluation of treatment needs and supportive interventions. They provide oversight to ensure that treatment is seamless and maintain regular follow up with the individual to monitor for further treatment or psychosocial needs. The care management component can be quite intensive initially and can require significant time and involvement with numerous Providers and programs.

The team will be adding another care manager in the near future who will concentrate on community liaison and provide these care management services at the Batavia site and the Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). Melissa Krul, MSW, is the VISN 2 transition patient advocate. She is a former U.S. Army Captain and an OIF Veteran. Melissa assists and advocates for severely injured service members and their families as they transition from the Military Health System of the Department of Defense to VA.

The OEF/OIF Care Team coordinates care with other programs as well. They work closely with VA Detective Jason Jaskula and the Buffalo Veterans' Court Program providing veterans with help for alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence legal issues. The team also works closely with Joan Chipps, LCSW, and her Suicide Prevention Team. In the Veterans Service Center, Denise Keefe and Paul Gross work with the OEF/OIF Team to enroll active duty and veterans into VA health care and provide information regarding VA health care and TRICARE benefits.

These team members allow for a diverse range of people and skills to provide service members, veterans and families the highest standard of care. Several members on the team have a behavioral health background which has been useful in providing an initial mental health evaluation. The team focuses on developing a trusting relationship which will only facilitate in the end a successful treatment course.

A morning briefing session is held to allow staff the means to communicate any issues in need of resolution. The Team believes in a "positive attitude" and start each day with a Thought for the Day which they share on their community bulletin board outside of their office. "If you don't have a positive attitude, you can't give one to anybody." That is why the morning meeting is crucial to the Team's mission.

The OEF/OIF Care Management Team provides an open door policy encouraging walk ins from any era. In the end, the goal of the OEF/OIF Care Management Team is simple, to help the service member, veteran and family by empowering them to know they are in control. Though the program is fairly new, Ms. Smythe hopes to see it as a best practice throughout all VA sites.

VA WNY Chief Learning Officer/Education Executive



Dr. Diane E. Wonch was appointed Chief Learning Officer/Education Executive at the VA Western New York Healthcare System May 11, 2008. She is a health behavioral scientist with a specialty in health counseling, disease prevention and health education. She is board certified in health education and hypnotherapy. She is a certified consultant, consulting in the areas of primary care, education and patient education in many VA's across the United States and Puerto Rico. Her subject expertise includes: patient education; stress management; adult learning theory, teaching strategies, health literacy; health behavior change and HIV/AIDS counseling.

Dr. Wonch joined VA in 1988 as the health education specialist for patient and family education and the regional education liaison until January 2000 at which time she served as the VISN 2 patient education director and national point of contact for My HealtheVet. Dr. Wonch has been successful in establishing a VISN 2 On-Demand health care education closed circuit TV and on-line education system for patients and staff that resulted in the capture of the Undersecretary for Health's 2000 Innovation Award. Her efforts, in collaboration with VA colleagues, have generated education technology for patient education, a patient learning needs assessment in CPRS (the VA electronic documentation system), and grants in the area of health literacy and staff health and wellness. Her publications reflect these projects.

Dr. Wonch's credentials include degrees from St Joseph's Teachers' College, BA in education and theology (1969); Trocaire College, AAS in nursing (1971); D'Youville College, BS in nursing (1976); State University of New York at Buffalo, Masters in Adult Health, Anthropology (1978) and Doctorate in Health Behavioral Science and Health Education (1990).

Prior to her tenure with VA, Dr. Wonch served the people of the State of New York at Roswell Park Cancer Center for 17 years in a variety of health-related capacities, the last as the Clinical Education Executive. Her experience as a surgical oncology clinical nurse specialist at Roswell has provided her a rich, diverse clinical background and a deep understanding of patients with complex health challenges and educational needs and the continuing education/training requirements of all the staff who are involved with their care.

In future editions of Vet Gazette, Dr Wonch will be contributing an entry regarding her objectives for staff and patient education.

Outrigger Canoeing



Veterans learned the skill of outrigger canoeing at Amherst Veterans Canal Park on Tonawanda Creek/Erie Canal. In coordination with Cape Ability Outrigger Ohana Inc., Disabled Sports USA and VA Western New York Healthcare System, veterans teamed up and paddled a 30 foot, double-hulled Hawaiian outrigger canoe rigged catamaran-style for safety. This inclusive sport allows adults with disabilities an opportunity to gain confidence and dignity while participating in an athletic activity with their family and fellow veterans. More outings are scheduled in upcoming

months. For more information, contact Pam Kaznowski, Recreation Therapist, at 716-862-6814.

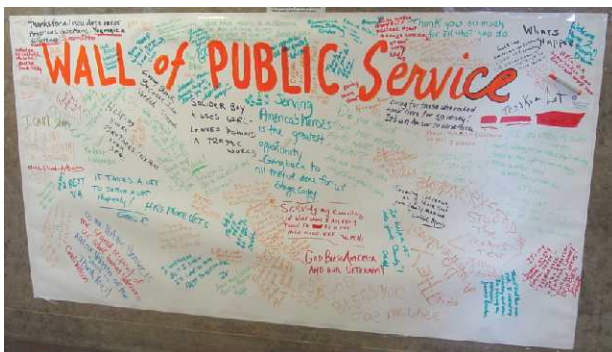
Schwartz Center Rounds

VA Western New York Healthcare System hosts Schwartz Center Rounds, unique, multi-disciplinary sessions in which hospital staff explore the emotional side of caregiving. A national program with sites across the country, Schwartz Center Rounds are funded by the Kenneth B. Schwartz Center, a Boston-based nonprofit dedicated to advancing compassionate healthcare.

In a typical Rounds session, a panel of caregivers presents a patient case that brought up interesting and important psychosocial issues. Topics have included: delivering bad news; when religious or spiritual beliefs conflict with medical advice; taking care of a colleague; and losing a patient. Hospital staff then share their own thoughts and feelings related to the day's topic.

Unlike grand rounds, these sessions are not about clinical problem-solving, but rather about exploring and processing the emotions that come up in the daily work of hospital staff. A comprehensive study of Schwartz Center Rounds has shown them to help caregivers connect better with patients emotionally; enhance their understanding of the effects of illness on patients and their families; improve communication among caregivers and decrease feelings of caregiver isolation and stress. Schwartz Center Rounds are held on the last Friday of the month. For more information about Schwartz Center Rounds, visit www.theschwartzcenter.org.

Public Service Recognition Week



Public Service Recognition Week honors those who serve America as federal, state and local government employees. During the week of May 5-9, activities took place to recognize VA Western New York Healthcare System employees and celebrate achievements. Pictured at left is the Buffalo Wall of Service.

Every year during Public Service Recognition Week, the Federal Executive Board holds the Excellence in Government Awards. This year the Helping Hands Feeding Team won the Team Award. Team members photographed at right are Julie Hammersmith, Rachel Castricone, Kelly Clark, Julie Winters. The program is designed to optimize and encourage safe oral intake at mealtime for patients with feeding and/or swallowing disorders. This program also provides training for volunteers in the proper techniques of feeding/assisting patients when eating meals. It has also created a bond between the volunteer and patient and has fostered positive friendships and companionship. VA employee, Diane DiFrancesco, Intensive Care Nurse, won the LTC Terrence Crowe Memorial Reservist of the Year Award as a member of the 914th Airlift Wing.



VA WNY... HEALING HEROES:

It's who we are and what we do.

It's Patient Centered

It's Shared Pride

It's Saving Lives

VA Western New York Healthcare System is a member of Planetree, a not-for-profit organization devoted to healing relationships that support holistic, patient-centered care. Patient-centered care incorporates the patients' perspectives and expectations and “sees” the experience “through the patients' eyes.” The role of the health care system is to provide an optimum healing environment for the body, mind and spirit. Implementing patient-centered care increases patient satisfaction. It has also helped to decrease staff turnovers, increase patient volumes, decrease medication errors and lower infection rates.

To promote patient-centered care, a Planetree Steering Committee has been formed. The team consists of 21 members from clinical and non-clinical departments, ancillary support services and physicians. There are representatives that range from managers and supervisors to front line staff in the organization. The members will coordinate and guide the work being done by Planetree teams within VA WNY Healthcare System. All day leadership retreats are being held on June 24 and 26 at Buffalo and June 25 at Batavia. These retreats are being held to provide managers and supervisors with the tools they need to support staff on our journey to Patient-Centered Hospital Designation.

On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind.

Dan Lipinski

Café VA

The new coffee café in Buffalo now has a name. With 276 entries received, Café VA won with 67 votes! Eight people submitted the winning name: Donna Leigh, Debi LoTempio Mohamed, Janice Alexander, Aaron Spain, Debbie Traugott, Suzanne Bensch and Carol Horton. They will receive free coffee for a week and a certificate of recognition.



Staff were recognized for selecting the name, Freedom Hall, for Buffalo's newly renovated auditorium. Photographed (L-R) are Jennifer Walton, Kathy Heberling, Cynthia Wilson, David Snyder, Pat Stokes, Joe Ilecki, Joe Mancuso. Missing from photo: Sherry Manion, Judith Dembinski, James Schlehr

Traumatic Brain Injury Research

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) has become the signature injury in veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While moderate to severe TBI is easily identified, and therefore more readily treated, mild TBI (mTBI) is more difficult to identify and diagnose

mTBI accounts for 80% of all non-fatal brain injuries in the US, and perhaps an even higher rate among returning veterans. mTBI can affect cognitive abilities such as memory, attention, and organizational skills, as well as emotional and behavioral functioning. War-related emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD can cause similar cognitive impairments

A \$1.4 million study of 500 returning veterans with and without TBI has been funded by VA Health Services Research and Development. This first large-scale study of the TBI screening procedure used in VA nationwide will be conducted across VISN 2: Buffalo, Albany, Syracuse, Canandaigua/Rochester, and Bath. The study will measure cognitive and emotional status across four time points, six months apart and will examine the concept of a "trauma profile," including both TBI and PTSD among veterans.

County Executive visits the Buffalo site

On Friday, May 30, Erie County Executive Chris Collins and Erie County Director Veterans Services, Dr. Patrick Welch visited the Buffalo site of VA Western NY Healthcare System. Mr. Finegan and other leaders met with them and discussed all the great things going at our sites. It was the County Executive's first visit to VA. Innovations with technology and work being done to serve returning troops and veterans of all eras were shared in a meeting with him. Some of our Six Sigma initiatives were also shared. A tour of Primary Care, Women's Wellness, OEF/OIF office, Dental, Emergency Department and Veterans Service Center was also provided.



Michael Finegan welcomes Chris Collins and Dr. Patrick Welch



Volunteers from Buffalo enjoy a recognition luncheon

National Volunteer Week

Volunteers were recently recognized at events in Buffalo and Batavia. The 2008 National Volunteer Week theme, celebrated April 27-May 2, "Volunteer to Change the World," truly reflects the power volunteers have to inspire the people they help! In the past year, 1,291 volunteers at VA Western New York Healthcare System (Buffalo & Batavia sites) contributed a total of 128,587 hours.

Awards & Recognition

Congratulations to Aimee Stanislawski-Zygaj, MD, 2008 recipients of the Briscoli Award for Resident-Faculty Academic Collaboration! The award will be presented at the 15th Annual Paul F. Briscoli Memorial Grand Rounds at UMass.

Excellence in Nursing winners for 2008 are: Louis Pullano, NA on 9A; Elizabeth Bezon, LPN on Pine Lodge; Marcia (Marcy) Groff, staff RN in PACU; Kimberly Kwietniewski RN in an expanded role, Nurse Manager HBPC.

Cindy Rohe, RN was nominated for Nurse of Distinction and featured in the Buffalo News.

Richard P. Myers, an MVAC Physician Assistant assigned to surgery, has been selected by the Department of the Army Human Resources Command to fill the position of State Surgeon in the New York Army National Guard, the highest medical position of the Army National Guard in New York State.

The Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, Inc. (AAHRPP) has granted full accreditation to the Research Department at VA Western New York Healthcare System, Buffalo. AAHRPP is a nonprofit organization that works with organizations that conduct human research to raise the level of protection for research participants and to promote ethically sound research. The accreditation program utilizes a voluntary, peer-driven, educational model.

Letters to the Director

From Chuck: I would like to take a moment to let you know of some of the outstanding staff and clinicians currently employed at the VA Buffalo Emergency Department. While home on leave from active duty, I was seen in the ED. Treatment was prompt and professional.

From Lucy: I am writing to you to comment the HBPC team! Thank you very much for such a special facility and staff.

From Michael: I am writing this letter to thank and praise Batavia social worker, Katy Ryan. The Batavia VA has a tremendous asset, a caring professional, dedicated to doing "the right thing" for the veteran.

From Mary: The Buffalo VA is the best! I say that because you go the extra mile. I respectfully request that you give Kathy Herman a pat on the back, along with all the other counselors that served my brother and brought him along. I tell everyone of the excellent care he receives.

Visit our Web site at <http://www1.va.gov/visns/visn02/buffalo.cfm>

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Evangeline Conley
Barbara Sellon

Editorial Assistants

Deborah Medakovich
Jennifer Putnam
Cynthia Wilson

Design

Barbara Sellon

Photography

Barbara Sellon
James Sheer
Evangeline Conley

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